

# Now & Then in Ripon ... *Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society*

## Before GPS, drivers relied on route guides

By Pat Grahn

When driving, most people no longer use paper maps for directions. After 1995, GPS started to become consumer-accessible in cars. By 2001, GPS became a standard with portable GPS units for cars. And today, smartphones integrate into cars for navigation.

However, early motorists relied on maps or other driving guides.

The King's Official Route Guide was a tour book containing the principal automobile routes in the states of Wisconsin, northeastern Illinois, eastern Minnesota and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The 1919 guidebook sold for \$1.50, which is equivalent to approximately \$28 today.

The guide describes the 7.2 route from Ripon to Green Lake as follows:

0 Leave the post office in Ripon, go straight ahead

2 Pass church on the left, go downhill on Fond du Lac Street, bear left on Liberty Street at church on left corner

3 Continue straight ahead

7 Pass school house on right (this street has a parkway) at forks

8 Take left fork, go up hill

Curve left, going uphill, this is the Dartford road; continue to go up hill, with fine view of Ripon at top of hill

1.2 Curve right

1.6 Pass cemetery on right

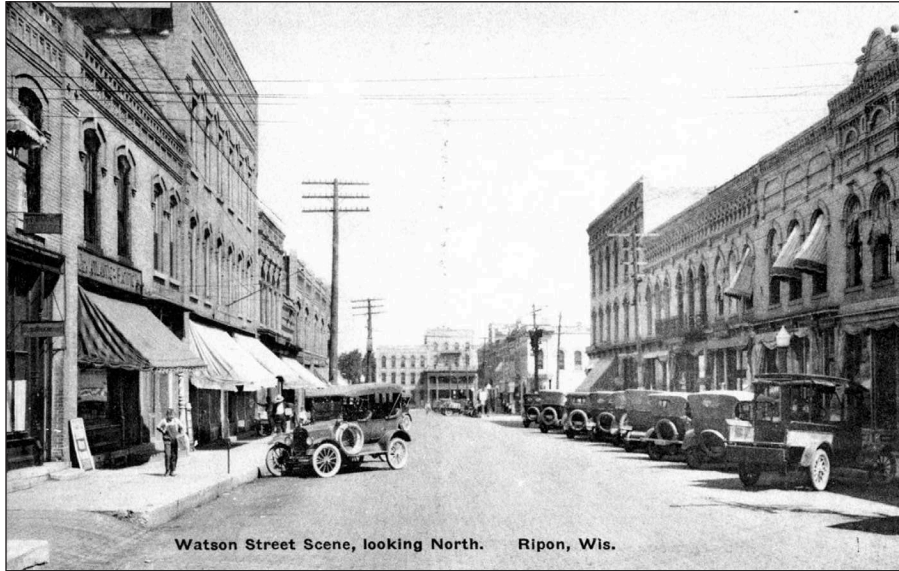
2.5 Curve left

3.4 turn right

3.7 Go slow down long hill known as Spalding's hill and then up grade, keeping to the right at top of grade; then go down grade

4.4 Cross small bridge and follow winding road

4.5 Curve right



**THIS UNDATED PHOTOGRAPH** of parked automobiles was taken looking north on Watson Street. The first automobile came to Ripon in 1904 and by 1912, 74 automobiles were in Ripon. Wisconsin produced the first road map in 1919. Motorists also used route, or travel guides available for sale from private companies for navigation when driving from city to city. *submitted photo*

4.7 Turn left and go straight ahead

7.0 Turn left

7.1 Turn right at livery barn on left to the center of

7.2 Green Lake, Wis. Library on farther left corner

In 1919, the Ripon Post Office was in the City Hall building at the triangle of Scott and West Fond du Lac streets at Watson Street. The directions are telling the motorist to go west on West Fond du Lac Street past what was the former Ripon Community Church at 155 State St. The motorist then would turn left at the current day Immanuel United Methodist Church onto Liberty Street. The school mentioned in the King's Official Route Guide is Ceresco School, which was razed in 1939.

At the fork of Combe Street and Dartford Road, the motorist would go left onto Dartford Road (Dartford was the original name of the community of Green Lake). The motorist would then pass St. Patrick's Catholic Cemetery on the right, which is found at the corner of Arcade Glen Road. They then would continue west on Dartford Road, which turns into Brooklyn G Road.

The motorist then would turn right on Spaulding Hill Road. The bridge mentioned spans Silver Creek. The next turn would be a left on Sunnyside Road, which becomes South Street in Green Lake. The livery barn mentioned in the directions is now North Bay Sport & Liquor at 501 South St. The directions end with turning right onto Mill Street

in Green Lake.

The first automobile in Ripon was owned by Dr. Austin Mitchell (?-1921) in 1904. By 1912, Ripon boasted 74 automobiles within the city limits. There were 21 varieties of cars in the city at that time, including 11 Buicks, 10 Maxwells, 9 Cadillacs and other brands such as Ford and Kissel.

At the time the Kings Route Guide was printed in 1919, Wisconsin's roughly 7,500 miles of roads were narrow and made of dirt or gravel. They were rutted and frequently muddy. Some roads were even made of logs placed over bogs. This made travel by car slow and hazardous. A few roads found near larger cities were made of macadam, an early form of asphalt.

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation issued the first edition of "Wisconsin's Official State Highway Map" in 1918. It sold for 10 cents a copy, which is approximately \$2.25 today. By the 1930s, the maps were distributed for free.

In 1919, Wisconsin was the first state to develop its own uniform highway classification and numbering system. This system became the foundation for a nationwide system and by 1927 the U.S. Highway numbering system was created, replacing the Wisconsin system.

*The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.*

*For more information, visit [www.riponhistory.org](http://www.riponhistory.org), [facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety](https://www.facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety) or [instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/](https://www.instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/).*

## Ripon Public Library will be closed May 31 to June 8

The Ripon Public Library and book drop will be closed Sunday, May 31 to Monday, June 8 as staff members are moving adult and teen materials back to the library's main

floor. Material may not be returned during this time. Due dates for materials due that week have been extended to June 15.

Follow the Ripon Public

Library on Facebook or check out its website for volunteer opportunities.

The final phase of renovations, which is the lower level, are ongoing through fall 2026.

The lower level, including meeting rooms and the Romper Room, will be closed to the public during this time.

Visit the library's website or follow Ripon Public Library

on Facebook for more information and the latest library news on programs, resources, renovation news and volunteer opportunities. Or, call a librarian at 920-748-6160.

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